

Interview Transcript

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Interviewee: Sister Ines Telles

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Sean Gary, Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University.

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Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments]

[00:00:21.10] SHANNON GREEN: Today is Tuesday, November 28, 2017. This is Mount St. Mary's University, CSJ Oral History Project, filming at Villa Carondelet in Los Angeles, California, Shannon Green interviewing Sister Ines Telles. Is that correct?

[00:00:39.18] SISTER INES TELLES: Correct.

[00:00:40.16] SHANNON GREEN: Okay, great. Sister Ines, could you start us out by stating your full name and your age?

[00:00:48.20] SISTER INES TELLES: Do I have to? [laughs].

[00:00:49.14] SHANNON GREEN: You think I don't know. [laughs]. It's for research purposes, you know--think of it in those terms.

[00:00:55.03] SISTER INES TELLES: My name is Sister Ines Telles, and I'm eighty years old.

[00:00:59.02] SHANNON GREEN: [whispers] Oh, I'm shocked! [laughs].

[00:01:02.04] SISTER INES TELLES: Eighty years old--eighty years young.

[00:01:06.19] SHANNON GREEN: There you go. Is it "Eye-nez" or "Ee-nez"?

[00:01:09.14] SISTER INES TELLES: "Ee-nes".

[00:01:10.10] SHANNON GREEN: "Ee-nes". Okay. Would you start us off about telling us a little bit about where you were born, your family, anything of your childhood you would like to share with us--

[00:01:18.04] SISTER INES TELLES: Oh my goodness--

[00:01:18.22] SHANNON GREEN: --just give us a little sense.

[00:01:20.12] SISTER INES TELLES: I was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico. My ancestors came from Spain. They were Jewish Spaniards that were kicked out of Spain in the 1600's, and they came with Coronado [Francisco Vázquez de Coronado y Luján (1510–1554), Spanish explorer]. And they landed in the territory of Mexico at that time, and intermarried with Indians and the natives and Mexicans. So we are called "Chicanos". We're not Mexican, we're not Spaniards, we're not Indians--we're everything. So--

[00:01:58.15] SHANNON GREEN: So tell me about your parents and siblings--

[00:02:01.26] SISTER INES TELLES: My parents--my father was a coal miner in Socorro, New Mexico before he met my mother, and afterwards worked for Lockheed [Martin, aerospace company] in Albuquerque. My mother was a seamstress and a wonderful cook, so she cooked for the very rich. So--and they were terrific parents. They never hit us, they never really--they taught us very carefully, but they also taught us about a God of fear [laughs]. So I had to learn afterwards that this God was a God of love.

[00:02:51.28] SHANNON GREEN: A very religious family?

[00:02:53.13] SISTER INES TELLES: Yes, absolutely. And that's what kept us straight and narrow.

[00:02:59.01] SHANNON GREEN: Any siblings?

[00:03:00.14] SISTER INES TELLES: I do--a brother and two sisters. And they're all married and have--I have a lot of nieces and nephews, grand nieces and nephews--they're all wonderful. Yeah, big family.

[00:03:13.19] SHANNON GREEN: When you were young did you have ideas about becoming a Sister, or--

[00:03:17.09] SISTER INES TELLES: Absolutely not. [laughs]. I disliked nuns, because my grammar school nuns were not kind. And so I really disliked them very, very much. And anything--I stayed away from them because I was fearful of them. Then in high school--my parents decided to come to California when I was fifteen--and so they wanted to send me to a Catholic school. Fifteen--I said, "No way." And they said, "Well, I'm sorry, we didn't give you that choice. You have three choices." And they gave me choices of three Catholic schools. And one sounded like a Latino school--St. Ferdinand's Mission. So I said, "I'll go to that--if I have to, okay, I'll go to that." And that's where I met our Sisters. And I watched them carefully. And they were kind and joyous and liked us. So they're the ones that changed my heart to seeing that these were women who were totally dedicated to others and very professional--very learned women. But still, that was something that was far, far away from my mind. I had no desire to be a nun.

[00:04:48.22] SHANNON GREEN: Were there any Sisters from St. Ferdinand's that you remember--whose names you would remember whose names you would like to mention?

[00:04:54.02] SISTER INES TELLES: Yes. Sister Miriam Therese [Larkin (1930-2010)??] was one. And she was--everyone will know her. Sister Ursula [??] was another. They were two beautiful women--kind, gentle, loving. And I did want to be like them, because not only were they kind, but they were brilliant. So they--they were very feminine and yet--I don't know--they encompassed the beauty of human beings.

[00:05:32.03] SHANNON GREEN: So when you were in high school, what did you think was next for you? What were your dreams?

[00:05:37.14] SISTER INES TELLES: Marriage. That was--and have twelve kids. [smiles]. That's--and I already had a boyfriend, so I thought--. And something in my head said, you know--oh, it was one of the Sisters who came up to me--Sister Ursula [??]--and said, "Have you ever thought of being a nun?" And I gasped, and said, "No way!" And she walked away. And that stayed in my head like a little seed. And I kept saying, "God please, you don't want me." And I named all the girls in

school, and said those are the ones you want. And I thought I was going to give my life away, and I did not want that. And I took advantage, because my boyfriend went into the Navy. And I thought, "Hm--I'll try it out." And then I thought, "Well, I'll try it out--I can always leave if I enter marriage, because of my Catholic faith I have to stay there". So I tried it out with always thinking I will leave as soon as possible. And here I am sixty years later.

[00:06:48.14] SHANNON GREEN: So you did enter after high school?

[00:06:51.00] SISTER INES TELLES: I did.

[00:06:51.15] SHANNON GREEN: Oh--with this idea that it might--

[00:06:54.17] SISTER INES TELLES: Well, I would go to church--the church was close by. The bus would leave me near the church, and I would enter the church to beg God not to take me. [laughs]. I would sit in the back and say, "Please God! Not me!" But as I said it more and more it became stronger and stronger, and then I thought--then this whole idea of "I can always leave if I don't like it"--[laughs]. Guess what? I don't have twelve kids--I have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of kids. And I have families, so--looking back it was the greatest decision I made with my life. I've had an adventure--pure adventure, that I would never have had if I were married, because I would be stationary. So I've had adventures that many married women might not have had--or I might not have had.

[00:08:01.18] SHANNON GREEN: What was--what do you remember from being a postulant and a novice? What were those days like for you?

[00:08:06.02] SISTER INES TELLES: We were the biggest group that entered the Sisters of St. Joseph. We were seventy-five girls. I thought I was entering all by myself. All of a sudden there were seventy-five eighteen-year-olds. So, it was wonderful. It was fun. It was a lot of fun. And learning how to pray and meditate--it--we prayed at home--it was not different, but meditation was a little different. And then, I don't know it was just--it was natural I think. But it was a lot of fun.

[00:08:49.21] SHANNON GREEN: You didn't find it too restrictive--or you adjusted all right to the disciplined life and the chores?

[00:08:55.13] SISTER INES TELLES: Well, I was learning about--I knew--I had in my head something stronger. And all of a sudden we were doing plays--we were playing--and doing all kinds of fun stuff. So it wasn't that restrictive.

[00:09:12.14] SHANNON GREEN: How did your parents feel about you becoming a Sister?

[00:09:15.08] SISTER INES TELLES: My mother was surprised. She said, "What?" But they were supportive. Remember, I came from a very strong Catholic family. So--they never thought that any one of their children would be a religious or a priest, but--they were happy about it. I never told my mother until the very, very end, because I didn't want her to support me in my decision. [laughs].

[00:09:41.22] SHANNON GREEN: You were looking for every which way--

[00:09:44.09] SISTER INES TELLES: Right. And I thought, "I don't want--she will encourage me, and I don't want that." I wanted it to be my decision, and if I leave I want to leave on my own. So--

[00:09:57.00] SHANNON GREEN: When you entered was it at St. Mary's Academy, or was it at--

[00:10:00.06] SISTER INES TELLES: At Carondelet Center--we were the first group to go there. So it was brand new, shiny. And they were still building, so we had a lot of nature with us--snakes, tarantulas--a lot of fun--[laughs]. So we were always picking up, you know, snakes and things like that. It was kind of "eighteen-year-ish"--eighteen-year-olds. So it's--yeah.

[00:10:28.19] SHANNON GREEN: And what did you think in terms of ministry--I don't know if you would have used that term then--but what did you think your mission would have been?

[00:10:34.10] SISTER INES TELLES: Well I was--I have no idea--I didn't care. I just wanted to help people. And that was another thing that pushed--kind of pushed me in my subconscious, I think--pushed me in. I kind of subconsciously knew that everyone was born to do something important in the world. I didn't know what that was, but I wanted to do something great with my life. I didn't just want to live and die. I wanted to do something and make the world better. I didn't know what that was, but I thought, maybe through here I can do it. And so--that's--

[00:11:21.08] SHANNON GREEN: Was there ever a moment when you remember thinking, "Okay, I'm in--I'm staying"?

[00:11:26.16] SISTER INES TELLES: When I made my vows each time, I realized--yes, something stronger--this--because the women that I observed were doing something good with their lives for others. They were teachers, they were--well, we were nurses or teachers at that time. And so people would respond to what they did. And they always seemed to say they had gotten better because they had--they were in their lives. So that's what started to convince me, that maybe this was my journey also.

[00:12:13.07] SHANNON GREEN: Do you remember some of the Sisters from that time who were particularly supportive or influential for you?

[00:12:19.10] SISTER INES TELLES: Yes, but I can't remember their names.

[00:12:22.21] SHANNON GREEN: It's--you began studying at the Mount then as well?

[00:12:24.24] SISTER INES TELLES: Yes. I graduated from the Mount as a teacher. And then went out to teach at Inglewood [California], and then St. James Francis in--where was it--oh my gosh--anyway it was a long time ago.

[00:12:44.12] SHANNON GREEN: St. James in Redondo [Beach, California]?

[00:12:45.13] SISTER INES TELLES: There you go--Redondo--St. James in Redondo Beach--and taught first and second. And that was great, because those little ones--I thought, "If I can push a little six year old, not only to read but to be creative"--and then all of a sudden the six year old was not only learning to read but they were learning to create plays and then they were dramatizing them. And each year I would learn a little more and I would push them just a little more, and so I thought, "This is great! I love it!" I loved that. But then I wanted to keep doing something bigger--for me, anyway. So I put my name down to be--for Peru. Peru was opening at that time, and I thought, "I speak Spanish, so I can--I'd like to go".

[00:13:48.12] SHANNON GREEN: You were raised bilingually?

[00:13:50.11] SISTER INES TELLES: Yes--"Spanglish". [laughs]. Not very good English and not very good Spanish. But we understood each other, so it was good.

[00:14:00.10] SHANNON GREEN: So before we get to more about Peru, I wanted to ask you, do you think you would have gone to college had you not entered?

[00:14:09.18] SISTER INES TELLES: Oh yes, absolutely.

[00:14:10.19] SHANNON GREEN: You were--

[00:14:10.28] SISTER INES TELLES: Oh yes, my mother was very high on education--all of us--all of us went to college and universities. So yes, that was a biggie in my family. My mom--she had encyclopedias and she had--I mean we had a library--a huge library in our family. So yes, education was very big.

[00:14:36.17] SHANNON GREEN: Also, in that time when you're a young Sister and it's before Vatican II [Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)], do you think you had a sense of the charism? We say "charism" now, but I know that term wasn't always used then--in terms of what the CSJ's were about and what about that drew you specifically?

[00:15:00.08] SISTER INES TELLES: Well, from the very beginning, our Sisters at St. Ferdinand's drew me because of their kindness and their--everything--even though we were diversified, they embraced every single person. They never played on differences, and it was always working together to do something great. So from the very beginning--I didn't call it "charism"--but I realized they were living it. And so doing it in our schools, when we went to teach, we kind of imbibed it. We didn't really learn it consciously. It just kind of became unconscious in a way that we worked with people, and the love that we had for those kids and the parents. And it wasn't just myself--it was--everyone was doing it, so you just followed. And that was the teaching--that was the whole teaching. So yes.

[00:16:11.28] SHANNON GREEN: Okay, [unintelligible] your file here for a second, and go back and forth. So you went and got a degree in Spanish?

[00:16:22.19] SISTER INES TELLES: In Puerto Rico.

[00:16:24.09] SHANNON GREEN: In Puerto Rico. What were you anticipating? Were you anticipating going to Peru at that time?

[00:16:28.22] SISTER INES TELLES: No I was going to Peru at that time. But they wanted--I was going straight to Peru, because one of the Sisters was sick. But then she got better. And so they said, "I think we're going to send you to Spanish school". And I thought to myself, "I already know Spanish". But it was a gift--not because I learned Spanish, but because the forty people that they had there at this Institute--they gave us a test and four of us knew Spanish conversationally and we could work without all of the lessons. So the instructor--the main director--said, "We would like to do something different with the four of you. We've never done this before. But if you're going to be missionaries, we want to do this. Would you permit us?" There were two priests and two Sisters, and so we said, "Sure! Anything!" I just wanted to go out and work. I didn't want to sit and learn. And so what they proposed was that--they paired us off, the priest and Sister, priest and Sister--and then they said, "We're going to take you to neighborhoods here in Puerto Rico and we're going to have you just learn about them and talk to them and see what you can do". So one morning, they took two of us--my partner and I--he's still working in Bolivia--he's a priest in

Bolivia. And he went--we went to this place--they dropped us off at eight o'clock in the morning, and said, "We'll come back at four for you." And we thought, "Okay." So we walked the neighborhood. People were watering their grass or they were doing--we just started to talk and get to know them. We had no idea where we were or what we were or what to do. No one told us what to do. Thank God I was with a priest who was a total extrovert. I'm an introvert. So he was talking away, so--at the end of three months we were visiting the jails, we were in--we had a mother's club, we had a youth group--and we learned how to communicate with people. And they really guided us. So when we finished our three months there, the four of us--the person, the director said, "I want you--all four of you--to go to Lima and to meet Father Gustavo Gutiérrez [Merio, O.P. (1928-), Peruvian theologian], who was the founder of theology of liberation. We had no idea who he was. "And he wants to work with the four of you for two weeks", and I thought, "I want to go to my mission--I don't want to study anymore!". [laughs]. Another gift. So we went to Lima, and he took us under his wing, and said--he taught us these Four Pillars that I'm going to be working on--a webinar on Friday. And what--I call them "The Four Pillars"--he didn't teach them that way, but--he taught us four things. He said to us, "You're going to be missionaries, hm? Bolivia and Peru. Well, you know that missionaries have done a lot of harm. You're not going to be one of those". And he said, "First of all, you didn't--you're not bringing God here. God is here. All you have to do is find him among the people." And--so he deflated me. I was going to save Peru--I was going to save all of Peru. [laughs]. And so--but he was funny. And then he said, "The second thing--you're not going to start where you are--you're going to start where they are". And he said, "Just remember, you've gone to universities, you've gone to this and that--and these people are in the jungle, they're in the Andes, they're farmers--that's where you're going to start". And then third, "Whatever you start with the people, you're going to do it with them--you're not going to do it for them". And then, the fourth thing, "You're going to leave--and it gets better". [laughs]. He was very--so those are the Four Pillars. And I've worked with them--they worked beautifully. I was in the Andes, I was in the coastal area, and I was in the jungle--in the Amazon. And they honestly worked very beautifully. I've learned from them. And that's how I work with our kids now.

[00:21:57.20] SHANNON GREEN: You served in Peru for more than twenty years?

[00:22:01.08] SISTER INES TELLES: Twenty-two.

[00:22:02.00] SHANNON GREEN: Twenty-two years. And you--did you feel at home there?

[00:22:06.04] SISTER INES TELLES: I loved it. I only came back because my mother was dying. We would come back every three years to be with them for three months, and then go back. And so my mother got sick and was really--and I hadn't been with her for a long time. So I wanted to be with her--but--thinking that I would go back--but realizing that as I came, she got better. And so she lived longer, because you know--it was wonderful, but I thought, "I'd better find a job". And so I found SEA [Soledad Enrichment Action, Inc.], the non-profit agency I work with now--and I fell in love with that. So I stayed.

[00:22:55.27] SHANNON GREEN: We'll get more into that too. I'm floored that--

[00:22:59.05] SISTER INES TELLES: --my passion--my passion--

[00:23:00.20] SHANNON GREEN: --I know, I know. [laughs]. We want to hear all about it. I'm floored by your experience with Gustavo Gutiérrez.

[00:23:06.00] SISTER INES TELLES: Really? He was my mentor for all the years I was there.

[00:23:09.26] SHANNON GREEN: I mean, you got to know him--

[00:23:11.07] SISTER INES TELLES: --oh very, very personally. He was my--

[00:23:12.23] SHANNON GREEN: --but back, back when--

[00:23:14.21] SISTER INES TELLES: --when he started--

[00:23:16.20] SHANNON GREEN: So--this kind of gives me--I mean, and I saw that you studied liberation theology, of course--

[00:23:22.17] SISTER INES TELLES: We lived it--we didn't just study it--we lived it.

[00:23:26.07] SHANNON GREEN: And Vatican II is really unfolding at this time--

[00:23:28.12] SISTER INES TELLES: Yes. Exactly.

[00:23:29.11] SHANNON GREEN: So of course this is after Medellín [Conference of Latin American Bishops Medellín, Colombia (1968)]--when is Medellín?

[00:23:31.20] SISTER INES TELLES: Yeah. It's around that--

[00:23:33.01] SHANNON GREEN: --around that time. So can you just tell a little bit more--so for people who aren't Catholics, of our students at the Mount who might not really understand what that is, or what this time is like, can you just flesh it out a little bit? Liberation theology in terms of, you know, Latin America and the context--and Vatican II and what that kind of is unfolding for you and--

[00:23:59.23] SISTER INES TELLES: Well, I can only mention what I lived during that time in the Church. Well the--I didn't really feel the structure as much, but it was very, very structured--everything was very structured. And when I got the privilege of going to Peru, and having Gustavo be my mentor--the mentor of the four of us, really--and then meeting priests that also thought like him--because he wasn't by himself. They fed into--and they had been--they were Peruvians and they had worked with the people--they had worked directly with the people. And they were listening to them. And they would offer Mass at--in Spanish, at times--everything was in Latin before--but in Spanish and Quechua and Aymara. And so--and then the Maryknoll priests during that--after a while--started to move in some of the rituals that the Aymara people had for burials. And it was beautiful. And that was part of the Mass. And so it became meaningful to the people that were--and it became meaningful to us, because that's what they lived, and these were their rituals. And all of a sudden they were being blessed to be within the Church liturgy. An example: when one of the Quechua people died, they would bring in the body. And then all of the people would bring food and all around the church--they would bring his favorite drinks, his favorite foods--and they would have a dance and stuff. But it was very beautiful. It was within this blessing. And then afterwards the body would leave and all the people would leave and we would go to the cemetery, and then share the foods--and have a little coca--chew a little coca--which is not cocaine--it's the coca leaf. And then it was a sharing--a deep sharing of what--the life of this person. So everything was done within this beautiful cultural type of thing. All of a sudden I think--the Church, Medellín and theology of liberation was taking the cultures and blessing them a saying, "This is where God is--this is where God is manifesting". And that's what we started to learn--their--God was manifesting in their music, God was manifesting in their dance and their rituals. And so it became an everyday discovery. It was a very powerful time. But at the same time, I

don't know if you were aware--at the same time we had communism that was very, very strong--especially among the university students. And so communism was taken very literally and very strongly. And so--that was at the same time. And we were working with a group called UNEC [Unión Nacional de Estudiantes Católicos (National Union of Catholic Students)]--Catholic university students. And many of them were Marxist. So I had to learn Marxism in order to communicate with them, to understand what they were talking about, because I was illiterate. And I had all these fears which were--a fear of ignorance, really. But then you learn, and you're not fearful anymore, and you see--then you can start dialoguing with the university students and things. You can clean all of this out, if you think it's strong and powerful.

[00:28:19.22] SHANNON GREEN: Oh yeah. If there's ever something you say and then you change your mind about, you can--

[00:28:24.24] SISTER INES TELLES: No. I'm not changing my mind. I lived it.

[00:28:26.15] SHANNON GREEN: Yes. I know--that's all good.

[00:28:30.00] SISTER INES TELLES: No, it was very, very strong during that time. So, at the same time we had theology of liberation we also had communism--Marxism. And it was something that you were supposed to read--not here in the United States--that was--if they found you with a book like that, it would be--but there, you--Mao Tse Tung [Mao Zedong (1893-1976), aka Chairman Mao, founder of People's Republic of China]--all of those--they were necessary readings for the university students. So anyone who worked with them, we also studied them in order to be able to dialogue. But some funny things happened also, as the university students--I got very, very close to many of them. And most of them were boys. And one day they came to my house and said, "Sister, we want to take you to a movie!" I was the one that had the car, so-- [laughs]. I said, "Oh, really?" "We'll pay for it." And I said, "What do you want to see?" And they wanted to see--oh my gosh, it slipped out of my head--I'm sorry--just--do you remember the movie that--oh--the Devil and what do you call that movie? You can clean this up.

[00:29:58.02] SHANNON GREEN: Absolutely, yeah. What year?

[00:30:00.18] SISTER INES TELLES: Where--in the sixties-seventies, where the young girl plays a ouija board--

[00:30:10.06] KELBY THWAITS: Exorcist? Or--

[00:30:11.01] SISTER INES TELLES: Exorcist--"The Exorcist" (1973)--that's it. They wanted to see "The Exorcist". [all laugh]. And so--so they said, "Sister! Take us! We'll pay for you!" And they were so excited I said, "Okay." I would not have gone except for them. Anyway, we went and I had read how they had made this movie and how they had her head had turned and all this stuff. When we came out of there, they were petrified--petrified. [laughs]. And I was driving back, one of the young men said, "If that church was open I'd go straight in". And I said, "What kind of a Marxist are you? You say you don't believe in God, and you want to go into church--and you believe in the Devil?" And he said to me, "You know, Ines," he says, "I'm a Marxist from my head up. I'm a Catholic from my neck down". [laughs]. And so we laughed--I laughed--I thought it was so funny. But anyway, he was wonderful--they were great. And so we were able to talk about religion--that movie opened this whole door on God and love and the powers of evil and the powers of good. And we had great discussions because we had seen this movie that frightened them. [laughs]. So--it was funny. There was some great stuff. But--and at the same time, during that time "Sendero Luminoso" started--"Shining Path". Now that was--that was scary. That was really scary. And we

were able to--because of the groups that we had--able to distinguish between what--and then by that time we were talking about God, because they allowed it--the kids allowed it. And then they could compare what Shining Path was doing to the people and what God really wanted. So it was a good start. I'm glad I went to "The Exorcist". [laughs]. Because it opened the door where it would not have opened before--you know, they would have said, "Oh she doesn't know anything about--". But--

[00:32:55.20] SHANNON GREEN: Who were some of the Sisters that you lived in community with that we might know--I mean, some of the LA Sisters who were there in Peru with you?

[00:33:02.21] SISTER INES TELLES: From here--from California?

[00:33:06.06] SHANNON GREEN: If you can think of any--

[00:33:08.18] SISTER INES TELLES: [Sister] Teresa Avalos (1934--), as she--you know her? Okay. She--now she's one of the first--practically one of the first ones that got there. [Sister] Therese Donahue (1931--2016). She died. Let's see--who else? We had a lot of other Sisters that came from St. Louis [Missouri] I lived with--they were nurses and we went to the Amazon. They were from St. Louis and New York.

[00:33:38.23] SHANNON GREEN: We just interviewed Sister Celia [DuRea '99].

[00:33:40.28] SISTER INES TELLES: And Celia--yeah, I did live with her--for a little tiny bit. [laughs].

[00:33:46.04] SHANNON GREEN: She told us a story about having to be hidden--

[00:33:50.09] SISTER INES TELLES: --in [Mol]--when she was in [Mol]--yes. That was scary.

[00:33:55.26] SHANNON GREEN: Did those kinds of moments--were you ever impacted by those kinds of traumatic moments--kind of more immediately, or was your community ever threatened with the violence, or--?

[00:34:06.16] SISTER INES TELLES: No. It was later on--it was later on. I think because we did work with the people--we connected with them--like these youth, you know. They would come and they'd say, you know, "Something is going to happen here" or "Something is going to happen". So they would even protect us--they'd warn us. And when we were--the people protected us, because we were among them--we didn't isolate ourselves. And we listened to them. So Gustavo did help us--theology of liberation really helped us. Because we were among the people--we listened--we heard things. And so they would warn us and help us and teach us what to do and what not to do. But there were scary moments--definitely.

[00:34:54.03] SHANNON GREEN: Were you--did you suffer from any of the earthquakes?

[00:34:58.28] SISTER INES TELLES: Yes. I think it was 1980--the one that was seven point something--where our Sisters were killed--one of our Sisters was killed. Yes. We had terrible things--yeah--in Chimbote--and I think [Sister] Teresa Avalos lived there during that time. And I went with a nurse to help, because I'm useless with medical stuff. But I would help her, you know, clean wounds and things like that. So yes.

[00:35:38.00] SHANNON GREEN: In part--terms of your work with young people and just what's

happening in the Church at that time, were there--did you see a lot of kind of lay empowerment, in terms of training catechists, or the small faith-based communities--

[00:35:53.04] SISTER INES TELLES: Yes.

[00:35:53.29] SHANNON GREEN: --was that all--were you involved with any of those kinds of ministries or--

[00:35:56.14] SISTER INES TELLES: When I was in the Amazon, the Jesuit priests had--we were deep into the Amazon. So the Jesuit priests had--they were living in the city which was called San Ignacio. And then to travel up to where we were, we would have to go by horse or mule and walk. So--and then all the communities of the [Awanudas??]--they were in the Amazon--you went deeper and deeper in--there were hundreds of communities. And so we had a Peruvian Sister who worked directly with a catechist. And what was beautiful about that was that the people--the community--chose the catechists, and usually chose--it would be usually a man--but a good person--one who was kind to his family, one who was communal--and they would choose him to be the catechist. And so then they would be trained by the Jesuits, and then they'd spread into these communities, because the priests couldn't go and say Mass every Sunday. He would--might visit them once a year. And so Sister--the Sister that was working with them, Carmen [??], and we were there--she would see that they didn't put any heresy or anything like that when they read something. But something that was beautiful--absolutely beautiful--done by a catechist--during the week in San Jose, everyone knew each other, okay? So it's a small area. And you have a Plaza de Armas, which is around a park, and everyone sees everything and knows everything. So these two women started to get in a fight. They started to holler and scream at each other and pull their hair. And they were really angry at each other. So during that week, everyone was talking about this fight. Sunday came, and we went to church. And the catechist stood in front--he was the one that did this ceremony--it was very beautiful--anyway, we all came. And then he said, "I cannot start this until the two women who were fighting come here". They did not want to go to church because they were so embarrassed. And so, "We cannot start--our community is broken". So some of the people went out to get the two women and bring them to the church. And so they did come, but they were still angry at each other. And he called them up and he said--and they stood in front of all of us--the community. And he said--and he read the part where you know, bring your gifts to the altar and if you have something you must take care of that first. And that was very--all of a sudden it came into life. And so he said we could not start the communal prayer until they forgave each other, because the forgiveness was also something that was also communal. And so as he talked, finally one woman reached out and hugged the other one, and then they forgave each other. Of course all of us were crying by that time. [laughs]. Then he turned to all of us and he said, "Now, all of you go to someone that you have hurt and ask forgiveness". And so the whole church went--we spread out all over the place. It was beautiful. You don't see that here. But you can do it there. And that was done by a lay person, who understood the Gospel in such a reverent way that I felt--that was the most beautiful liturgy that we had had. And yes, lay people do beautiful things when they understand their community. Again, they came from the community--he was selected by the community--and you know, he served the community in that way. So yes, I found God all the time in special ways--things that you hear about, or that they preach--this was not preaching, this was acted on. And what a difference it makes.

[00:41:08.20] SHANNON GREEN: Is there any--there's so much in Peru, but--I know we have more to talk about. Is there anything else from that time that you are either most proud of or just want to make sure we know about? Anything else you'd like to share from your years--your twenty-two years in Peru?

[00:41:28.07] SISTER INES TELLES: I met some great, great human beings--totally dedicated. A young man, who--I lived in Ica for eighteen years--eighteen of those twenty-two years--which was a coastal area. And he went to the seminary--he always wanted to be a priest in Ica, for the Ica diocese. And during the time he lived with a very poor, poor--near the river--the poorest of the poor--and he would live with them. And then he went to the seminary. But he was brilliant also, and he was a journalist in his own right. And at the time, we had a Cardinal, who still was not in Vatican II. [laughs]. He loved the robes and the whole thing. And his name was Landázuri--Cardinal Landázuri [Juan Landázuri Ricketts (1913-1997), Archbishop Emeritus of Lima, Peru]. And so, Lucho was--he started to have a little periodical, and he would put it on the bulletin board. And in one of these--he really wasn't making fun, but at the same time he couldn't help it, I think. And he called him "Grandázuri". [laughs]. And he put it up and someone told the Cardinal. So the Cardinal came to the seminary to meet with Lucho and tell him he was out--he would no longer be a priest--"Get out!" And so Lucho being Lucho, thanked him, then went into the library and started a fast. And the other seminarians came with him and they all went into this fast. And he was--he was number one in education, so they couldn't kick him out because he didn't know what he was doing. But--so then, we all came from different areas, priests and Sisters, and we had banners in front of the cathedral--[laughs]--yes, I remember that. So, we were protesting about how could they--someone who was totally dedicated to the people and wanted to serve the people, why would they kick him out for some--you know, something that we felt stupid. Anyway we made a big fuss, so they kept him. So he graduated. So he left the seminary hoping he would become a priest for Ica. But--[laughs]--as time went on, they elected a Bishop for Ica--a new Bishop who didn't know anything there. And Lucho just happened--because he was--he was taking pictures for his--for what he was going to write--and the Cardinal spotted him. And he said to the new Bishop, "Do you see that young man? You will never ordain him". Now we found this out afterwards--"You will never ordain that young man, ever". And so the new Bishop had no idea, and so he said, "Okay." He wouldn't do that. So when Lucho came to ask for--to be ordained, the Bishop said, "No". And he didn't give him a reason. So we organized ourselves and we organized the people, and we said, "Lucho, if the Bishop doesn't want to, the people will call you to priesthood". So we had thousands of names that knew Lucho and wanted him as a priest. And we signed our names and we offered this letter to the Bishop. And he refused. And he wouldn't tell us why. And so Lucho decided to go to Germany and study, you know, journalism. And he was brilliant, so he learned the German language quickly, came back, and went to Puno, which is up in the Andes. And when he was in Puno, he served the people. He was not--but everyone called him "Father"--he was not--he would say, "I'm not". But they loved him and they said, "Oh what do we have to do to make you a Father--to make you a priest?" And so then we went to the Bishop there in Puno, and he ordained him. And, my goodness, there was three days of celebration. I will always remember that, because we have human beings like that, that come out of the people, serve the people, and then want to serve in a different way. And now Gustavo was definitely supporting him--and all of these. So you don't hear about those things here in the States, but I got to live them. And I'm very grateful. Now Lucho came for my fiftieth, all the way from Peru, to celebrate with me, because--now he's a very special friend. He's a poet also--he writes--he has books and poetry in Spanish and everything, so. You know, I have beautiful, beautiful friends.

[00:47:39.02] SHANNON GREEN: Do you go back to Peru?

[00:47:40.12] SISTER INES TELLES: I've gone. I went ten years ago with my niece--three--two nephews and one niece. And then we visited some of the places--we couldn't go to all of the places, but yes. It was nice. You could see that Peru has really touched my heart.

[00:48:00.14] SHANNON GREEN: You've already shared a little bit about why that came to an end for you--

[00:48:04.21] SISTER INES TELLES: Yes.

[00:48:05.16] SHANNON GREEN: --in terms of your family [unintelligible]. And then--you had the opportunities for study along the way too--

[00:48:14.13] SISTER INES TELLES: Oh, yes. I studied lots. [all laugh].

[00:48:20.06] SHANNON GREEN: How did you come to learn--is SEA really then kind of the next big chapter in your ministerial life? So how did you come to learn--

[00:48:30.14] SISTER INES TELLES: A friend was working there, and I wanted something similar if I was going to stay. Well, I didn't know I was going to stay. I thought I wanted to do something similar--I want to connect with youth. And when I heard that there was this area that was working with gangs, I thought, I know nothing about gangs, but it sounds terrific. [laughs]. So I'll go and find out. And of course, I'm still there.

[00:48:57.02] SHANNON GREEN: So would you tell us what SEA stands for, and a little bit about the overall mission of the organization?

[00:49:01.29] SISTER INES TELLES: Yes. SEA means "Soledad Enrichment Action". It was started in the Church of Soledad on Cesar Chavez in East LA. And it was--it began with a mother who was burying her second son to gang violence. And East LA had three or four gangs that were all enemies, and they were killing each other. And these parents wanted to stop that, because it was very, very dangerous. And this mother had two more sons. And she thought, "I have to do something!" So with Brother Modesto, who was working at Soledad--came together, and they said, "Let's get all the parents who have lost children." And so about fifteen of them came together and they talked about, yes, they all wanted to stop this. Even though their children were in enemy gangs, they wanted to work together and see what they could do. So they walked the streets. Now these are parents that have no money, not a great education, but they have this deep love for their kids. So they walked the streets, asking the kids on the corners what they wanted--what they needed. And all the kids said, "We want to go back to school, but no one wants us." They were kicked out because of bad behavior. And they call themselves the throwaway kids of society. And so they started a school in East LA, a small school. And we were near the Probation Department--well, I wasn't there yet, but--Probation Department and the court and all that. And so when I got there, there was this one school, and the kids would come drugged--PCP--they were really high. And they were really--terrible behavior. And any authority would "F" you out. They'd look at you and, I mean, just "F" you out. So you had to learn how to--first of all, get them to even talk to you nicely. But they had no other place to go, and they were treated nicely, so they started to calm down. And if you can get past the facade--you know, the masks that they wear, then you find this beautiful human being. But it's that first encounter that--they don't want you close by. They act real tough and they're not trusting. And anyone that looks like authority, you know--they don't want anything to do with that person. So, little by little, as you start to discover their leadership, their survival techniques--and their kindness to each other--the gangs are really a community. They do bad stuff, but they help each other, they connect with each other, they protect each other. And I thought if I could create something like that, that's good, that would be great.

[00:52:37.15] SISTER INES TELLES: So a friend of mine said, "You know, Ines," he said--he's from Colorado, and he just happens to work with--happened to work with Nobel Peace Laureates at the time. And he said, "You know," he said, "the kids in the world look at our kids in LA and they copy them, because they're close to Hollywood. And they watch to see what they're doing and they copy

that. And all the kids in LA are doing is exporting gangs, drugs, and violence." So I said to him, "We're going to do something different. We're going to start exporting youth groups of peace--service to others, and peace." I had no idea how we were going to do that, but we're going to do it. [laughs]. And so my work from--has been in cultivating this. And so, it's happening among these youth. So we started, and he helped me out at the very beginning. He connected me with Rigoberta Menchú [Tum [(1959-)], the Nobel Peace Laureate from Guatemala. And we had our first conference--I had never created a conference, but I thought, "I'll do anything for these kids." And I invited them to come--our kids from the school. And the first group were about a hundred who came. And we went to Loyola University--we had it there. And Rigoberta talked about peace, and forgiveness. And the kids for the first time understood what forgiveness was--because here was a woman whose family and people had been killed, and yet--they could not understand. The line to ask her questions--"Why would you forgive? Why don't you take revenge?" But she was able to help them understand what forgiveness was. And then the second conference--all of a sudden it became--"Sister, when are you going to have the next one?" So I said, "Okay." So we invited Jody Williams [(1950-), American political activist], another Nobel Peace Laureate who got rid of--well, helped countries get rid of land mines--and the land mines in our heads. And she talked about having land mines here [points to her head]. She was funny and she was great. The third--then it was now, "Next year who are we going to have?" [laughs]. So I got kind of bold, and I invited Arun [Manilal] Gandhi [(1934-), Indian-American socio-political activist], Mohandas Gandhi's grandson. And he came to talk about becoming a peacemaker. And for the first time, they seriously looked at themselves as becoming peacemakers--ambassadors to peace. And during that year, we went to the Congo for two weeks, and we helped Dr. Mutombo [Professor Mutombo Nkulu-N'Sengha] who was starting the Bumuntu Peace Institute (BPI) with child soldiers there. And he said, "You have child soldiers, so let's take them and--". Now, they speak French. But we can--and our youth, they're alumni now, and they still connect with the youth in the Congo. And they came back totally changed. Youth that weren't even thinking of the university as a possibility all of a sudden one of them said, "I'm good at math--they keep telling me I'm good at math--I'm going to be a physicist so that I can work on cleaning water"--because the Congo River is totally polluted. And the only water we had during that time was water that came from the United Nations and bottled water. So she's dedicated her life becoming a physicist. Another one said, "I'm going to be a Doctor Without Borders". So all of a sudden, even their education took on a global--it wasn't just making money for themselves, it was helping the globe--helping the planet. Then I got really enthusiastic about that. Then they youth in San Diego--we have a school in--not in San Diego, I'm sorry--Long Beach--they called me, and said, "Sister, we know who we want this year." Now, it's a given. [laughs]. And I said, "Who do you want?" And they said, "Ishmael Beah". [Ishmael Beah (1980-), Sierra Leonean author and human rights activist]. Do you know him? He was a child soldier from Sierra Leone, Africa, and he was taken when he was twelve. And then afterwards he was really freed when he was sixteen. He did terrible things--but now is an ambassador for the United Nations. So we invited him. It's not like picking up the telephone and saying, "Would you come?" [laughs]. But anyway, he came. And the kids really loved him, because he kept saying, "It doesn't matter what your background is, it doesn't matter what you've done, it's what you are doing now that counts." And then they seriously started to consider themselves as ambassadors of peace. And then, the next year, I thought, "I haven't had any Latino heroes". So--then someone said, "Jose Hernández, the astronaut" [José Moreno Hernández [(1962-), American engineer and former NASA astronaut]--the Latino astronaut that went up to the moon many times. So he came and talked about going for your dreams. He was a--he worked in Fresno with his dad, and--picking up--you know, farmworker. And he's now an astronaut. So he came and talked to them about reaching your dreams. And then these last three years we've been working on human trafficking, because the gangs have gotten involved in human trafficking. And it's a very terrible thing, so we wanted our kids to be protected. So we've had our conferences--two conferences for parents, and three for youth--on human trafficking. And so--and every--our youth groups, in every school that we have,

they get the ten global calls to action, that were created by the Nobel Peace Laureates. And they're global--getting rid of poverty, cleaning the environment, all of that. And so they have to choose one and do service in the community, and then they showcase it at the conference. So--I have a video of every conference--little videos--so I might send snippets with our--to--I'm very proud of what the kids are doing.

[01:00:11.12] SHANNON GREEN: So tell me a little bit more about how it works on the kind of day-to-day level. So you have kind of this conference every year that seems to [unintelligible]--

[01:00:19.16] SISTER INES TELLES: --once a year--

[01:00:20.28] SHANNON GREEN: --so on the ground level, you're in schools?

[01:00:24.21] SISTER INES TELLES: I personally am not. I'm in an office and I'm working on the curriculums and all of that. And I train. Our teachers are--they are teachers--they're real teachers. And they teach everyday math and all of that. But among them they choose one to be a mentor. And during the year, they take one of the global calls to action, and then they prepare the kids to do something in the community. And so the lessons--and usually Social Studies, or English, or something like that, that they work with. And our kids have done all kinds of things on racism, on violence, you know, especially South LA-- there's a lot of racial issues. And so they have studied the racial issues among themselves--first with the community, you know, what they're doing to us--then all of a sudden they realize that they were--they also were racially--sometimes conflicts were happening in the school between the Latinos and the blacks. And they decided to work in their school. But the mentor really is the one that guides them. So all year long they're working on something. What we want to do--and it's not perfect yet--but what we want to do is we want education to be more holistic, and to bring in the whole person, not only the academics, but to bring in the heart--the compassion, the empathy--to bring that in with--. So right now what I'm doing is working on lesson plans to pull that in deeper and stronger. So yes, all year long the kids are doing something. We take them--sometimes we get a chance to take them to the Museum of Tolerance or, you know, things like that, that will make them--.

[01:02:33.15] SISTER INES TELLES: At the same time, many years ago, I started the Parents Helping Parents. And I realized that a lot of the violence that the kids learn comes from home. And so, one of the youth really guided me towards that. He came--he was very, very angry. And he said to me, "Why doesn't somebody do something with our parents? I'm getting better here and it's the same old blah blah at home. Our parents need to be educated." And then he went in, very, very upset. So I went to Brother Modesto and said, "Does anyone work with parents?" And he said, "No--why don't you do it?" [laughs]. And I said, "Well, uh, I'm not married and I don't have kids--ah! But I learned how to work with people in Peru." So then I created the Parents Helping Parents curriculum. And what I did is, I went to the parents, and asked them, "What do you need--what would you like to learn as a parent?" And they gave me--and then I went to the sheriffs, I went to the kids--"What do you want your--". And I gathered it all--and we went to the judges. And so the curriculum is based on what all of them said. And it's been very successful. It's gone to Chicago, it's gone to Washington, it's gone to Oregon, it's gone to Texas--and even [LACO??] has asked me to train their parents--their parent advocates. So something is happening. But I think people have this hunger to be peaceful, and not to repeat old stuff, you know--our old ways of parenting. Because there's some beautiful ways of connecting with your own children. And I've seen miracle after miracle, even if the relationship is broken. If the parent reaches out in a loving way, the gang--the hardest gang--can't resist--they cannot resist the parent. There's a bond there that a child and a parent have that they don't have with anybody else.

[01:05:01.02] SHANNON GREEN: So I'm struck by a number of things. [laughs]. One is that--from your time in Puerto Rico, and maybe before--but you started to articulate going around and asking people what they needed.

[01:05:15.17] SISTER INES TELLES: Right.

[01:05:16.28] SHANNON GREEN: And that seems very CSJ.

[01:05:18.01] SISTER INES TELLES: Oh, yes. [laughs].

[01:05:19.17] SHANNON GREEN: Could you just articulate that part of the charism and just make that connection for us?

[01:05:25.01] SISTER INES TELLES: I don't know if I can--but one of the things that we were taught is, the wisdom is, all of us have a piece of the truth, right? And so if you want to help anyone, you've got to ask them what they need or what they want, and not do it for them. And the only way they can participate in their own growth is to be part of the planning. And even the youth--nobody wants to be "worked on"--they want to be "worked with". And they don't want--really, people don't want to be--things done for them. Because they're not victims, honest. They might believe they are victims but they're not. They are powerful, human beings. So I think that from the very beginning, our Sisters taught us how to connect with people. And it was only enhanced by the people that I learned and met. But it's this whole thing about believing in the strength and wisdom and beauty of people. So it was enhanced by others. Yeah.

[01:06:44.25] SHANNON GREEN: You know, from what I've been--the story goes--even in 1650 they were asking on the streets of Le Puy, "What do you need? What do you need?"--

[01:06:52.15] SISTER INES TELLES: Right.

[01:06:55.22] SHANNON GREEN: --and responding to that. And I often reflect that, you know, like Gustavo said to you, missionaries have done a lot of harm--

[01:07:04.16] SISTER INES TELLES: Yes, they have.

[01:07:05.18] SHANNON GREEN: --probably in part because they don't ask what people need. [laughs].

[01:07:08.19] SISTER INES TELLES: Yeah, and they say, "I know what you need, and I'll get it for you. I'll do it. And you better do it." [laughs].

[01:07:15.20] SHANNON GREEN: Yeah. But the CSJ way seems--like you said--it's like--preserves the agency of the human person. And they ought to have a voice in their own life.

[01:07:23.27] SISTER INES TELLES: All we truly believe--I think we really do--we truly believe that the person is born with power. And the person is born with a mission. Now, that power is a seed--it's a potential. It is--and as you're growing--and if you have a family that, you know, helps you and cultivates it, then it keeps growing--that seed keeps growing. And if not, then it's covered by a lot--it's still there, but it's covered by a lot of negative thinking about yourself, about--with violence and all that. And so, if you truly believe that the other person has power, even in seed form--and that's what I believe with our kids--and that the only thing you have to do is to try and help them look at the way they're thinking that's covering up all that stuff. And then when they

discover that, they start to clean their thinking and then the growth starts to happen. And I've seen it over and over and over again. And we truly believe that. I just am very glad that I chose the right group of women to do this with. Yes.

[01:08:52.09] SHANNON GREEN: There's also a lot of strong themes of unity and reconciliation--

[01:08:56.06] SISTER INES TELLES: That's right.

[01:08:57.11] SHANNON GREEN: --unifying love.

[01:08:58.10] SISTER INES TELLES: Yes.

[01:09:00.02] SHANNON GREEN: When does that--do those terms--in your religious life, did you actively participate in those kinds of--shaping of the language that we use now around charism? Or when do you remember kind of starting to engage with those--

[01:09:15.19] SISTER INES TELLES: To tell you the truth, I don't care about words. For me, it's action. Yes, I've been in chapters and--but a word has to have depth. We can change a word and it means nothing if you don't live it. And so if--we got to points in our chapters, in our meetings, in which the majority of us were willing to live what we put down, and if--it's just empty if it isn't. Just--we read a lot of stuff and it's beautiful, but it isn't lived. So when it is lived it becomes vibrant and it changes. It just--not a word--it becomes a human being. So yes, I been in a lot of meetings, and a lot of--yes, all of that. But--I like the action part--putting it into action.

[01:10:31.13] SHANNON GREEN: Well, and the way you tell the stories, those themes--they take--just comes right out. You know, the themes--I hear it, even though you're not saying it. But it's what it's--[unintelligible].

[01:10:40.07] SISTER INES TELLES: Right. Yeah. I wouldn't change my life for anything. I've had adventures that--it's been wonderful. No really--when finally God pushed me and said--I think I have fought God in many ways. And each time--now I don't, because I realize that--where I don't want to go--like right now for the webinar--that is something kind of new and I don't want that. And I'm beginning to find the resistance that I had before on certain things like, "I want to go to Peru right now--I don't want to go to Puerto Rico" type of thing--all of a sudden the webinar is like my--the voice within me saying, "Didn't you want to connect with the planet? You can't go to every country and connect with one or two people. Here's a way. So do it!" "But I'm afraid. I don't know how." "Do it--learn." And so I have these two voices--one that keeps resisting, and I want to go back to the comfort zone, which means nothing--and the other one that keeps pushing me and saying, "Do something new--adventure", you know, "Don't stay with the old". The world is changing, and we can't stay with our old stuff. Like the "yesterday thoughts". I get up in the morning and I have the thoughts that I had yesterday, and the day before. [Shakes her head.] The world needs new things, right?

[01:12:29.23] SHANNON GREEN: Can you share with us--I'm thinking about our students--young women, many who have a deep desire to serve in their communities, especially LA, you know? So I'm wondering--any wisdom or--

[01:12:45.21] SISTER INES TELLES: [laughs]. Wisdom--

[01:12:46.17] SHANNON GREEN: --or advice you'd like to share--and thinking in a couple of different ways. One is spiritually. You have so much joy about you and you've been in some very

broken places in our world, you know, but you have this hope, you know? So what spiritually kind of keeps you there? And then also anything you might say about leadership, because that's also very important for us for our young women.

[01:13:11.11] SISTER INES TELLES: Well I find it a privilege to live in 2017 in this world that we have--in this planet today. In reading different things, I realize--and scientists are saying--that we have all the answers to the problems we face today in our planet. All of them. We have all the answers. We can get rid of poverty, we can get rid of hunger, we can get rid of homelessness, we can get rid of wars. But, we have to clean our thinking. That's--we have to have a paradigm shift. Then we can use all the techniques, all the things that we have at our hands, and our knowledge as human beings. So the young people that are today young and vibrant--are--I think they should look at this world as a privilege to live today. Things are falling apart--our economical part--even religion. You know, our social--the--all our thinking that kept us divided--we were all, you know, I'm the only one--[laughs]--I don't care about you. All of a sudden say, "No, no, no--we're all related, and we need each other." And so our young people have all the, you know, knowledge of--all the technical stuff that--we are older--that are trying to learn how to connect with the world--they have all of this at their hands. They can do so much--if they let go of old paradigms that were taught to them by those of us who have created the problems. What did Edison say? "We cannot solve the problems with the mindset that created them." We have to have a new mindset--a new way of thinking. And there's some beautiful things that are happening. And I have connected with a group called Seeds of Peace. And they're young adults who have connected with each other, and they're from countries that are war-torn countries--and they're coming together to learn leadership. Because the way that--my leadership might not be the way that is needed right now. You know, it has to be a new way of connecting with other countries, with other war-torn--with diversity, and all of that. And the privilege of being young during this time, I think, is wonderful. And all the knowledge that is happening. I'd say move from old paradigms--you're young--and move into new ones--and create--and risk-taking--new things that are happening. You know, we don't have to live in war-torn countries. We don't have to answer our problems through war. And, you know, all of this old stuff is--the more powerful I am--you know, I'm stronger than you are, and I don't care about you--that kind of stuff--that's old [para??] stuff. We created that--the old--all of us old ones--we created all that junk. It doesn't work now. Things are falling apart. But we can create new things. And if the young have hope in their own strength and in their own wisdom--wow. They are wise. I can only talk about what I've had before. But there's beautiful things that are happening today. And not to--even the news--you know, "fake news" and news--everything is falling apart, kind of. And in a way it should, so we can create new things. So young people--move into the--and create new--new compassionate, empathy, using all the relational part. We don't need wars. We need each other.

[01:17:59.07] SHANNON GREEN: Sister, is there anything that you--as you thought about today--in the very short amount of time you had to think about today--that you wanted to talk about or share that I haven't asked you about thus far?

[01:18:11.17] SISTER INES TELLES: The only think I can say--it doesn't matter. We have to grow. We have to keep growing. It has nothing to do with age. It has to do with our thinking. I know very young people who think in a very old way. And this is not the time to do that. I'm studying quantum physics. I know hardly--I understand very little of it. But what I do understand I love. There's new discoveries--scientists who are becoming now more spiritual. They're the ones that are pushing meditation--they're the ones that are pushing the power--the inner power. And we talked about that in religion, but they're now proving it through science--that we can heal ourselves, we can heal the world. And so it only empowers us that have religion--that have--they are discovering God. They don't call God, "God", like that--but they--you know, a superpower or--

--but anyway--or the "field", that whole thing. But we--I just say--we're just lucky to live in this time. And we're here for a purpose. We don't have to accept all the horrors that are happening--we can do something different. We are not helpless. We are powerful.

[01:20:00.29] SHANNON GREEN: Is there anything about being a CSJ--you've spoken so beautifully about your life as a CSJ--that you wouldn't change. Anything about your community that makes you most proud?

[01:20:15.17] SISTER INES TELLES: Well I think that we support each other, no matter how different we are--no matter the different experiences that we've had. We do support each other. And I think that's beautiful. Many of our Sisters--I need--when I went to the Congo, I needed the--to pay for that trip. Our Sisters really paid for it. I asked for a loan. They--many of them--I mean, the grants that we get from our community have helped me to put on these conferences. I have gone to the Hilton Foundation for Sisters, and they do that--but our Sisters have helped, and have given us money. And so whatever one Sister does, everyone is there--because we put our money where our mouth is. And so, yeah. I'm very proud to be a CSJ--really, really proud. They're the ones that have made it possible--and support--wherever we have been--the support has been there. It's been--I've had a great life. And that has a lot to do with my choice of entering the Sisters of St. Joseph. Thank you.

[01:21:37.12] [Director's comments].

[01:21:53.01] KELBY THWAITS: Can I just ask really quickly--you can just give a brief answer--I'm just curious--so you have a big background with "Spanglish"--[all laugh]--Spanish and English--and culturally you also have that background. Have you found that to help or hurt situations with first impressions with some of the youth that you've dealt with? Have they ever been resistant or has that been a draw to them to connect with, you know, either or?

[01:22:21.26] SISTER INES TELLES: I think the fact that--well, a lot of our gang members are Latinos. So that's been a connector right away. And then our black community--because they see the connection in the school and all of that, that we have some--we have a good relationship with our kids--the black kids and everything. And then, everyone goes to that conference. But yes, it's been a help. [laughs].

[01:22:51.08] KELBY THWAITS: I assumed it was, and I'm curious what your perception about that was.

[01:22:57.28] SISTER INES TELLES: It helps.

[01:23:00.17] [Director's comments].

[01:23:05.12] End of interview.

Interview Index

Interview Date: 11/28/2017

Interviewee: Sister Ines Telles

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Sean Gary, Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University.

Location: Villa Carondelet, Los Angeles, California.

Transcription Date: 01/29/2018

Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments]

[00:00:21.08] Date, location participants.

[00:00:42.10] Full name and age: Sister Ines Telles [pronounced "Eee-nez Tay-es"], age 80.

[00:01:12.03] Early life and family. Born Albuquerque, New Mexico. Ancestry "chicanos". Religious family: "God of fear".

[00:03:13.06] Early vocation. "Disliked nuns". Moving to California age 15. Meeting CSJs at St. Ferdinand's Mission school in California. Sisters at St. Ferdinand's Mission school: Sister Miriam Therese [Larkin (1930–2010)??]. Sister Ursula [??]. Sister Ursula [??] asking if she wanted to be a nun. "Trying it out".

[00:08:00.25] Postulant and novitiate life. Entry group of 75 women. Prayer and meditation. Parents reaction to vocation. Life at newly-built Carondelet Center. Expectations of ministry. Taking vows.

[00:12:22.08] Studying Education at MSMC. Teaching first and second grade at Inglewood and St. James Frances, Redondo Beach. Deciding on mission to Peru. Parents expectation for education.

[00:14:38.14] Early ideas of charism. Example of CSJs.

[00:16:11.16] Obtaining degree in Spanish in Puerto Rico. Immersive language learning project (3 months). Visiting correctional institutes, creating mother's club, youth group.

[00:19:15.19] Two weeks training with Father Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino, O.P. [(1928), Peruvian theologian and founder of liberation theology] in Lima, Peru. Four Pillars: 1) Finding God among people instead of bringing God there, 2) Starting where people are not where you are, 3) Working with people, not for them, 4) You will leave and it gets better.

[00:21:33.18] Missions in Andes, coastal areas, jungle of Peru (22 years). Returning to California due to mother's illness. Working for Soledad Enrichment Action Inc. (SEA) youth ministry.

[00:23:04.01] Father Gustavo Gutiérrez, mentor. Liberation theology. Conference of Latin American Bishops Medellín, Colombia (1968). Vatican II. Mass in vernacular languages. Incorporating Aymara and Quechua rituals in Mass. Example of Quechua burial ritual. Communism (Marxism). Unión Nacional de Estudiantes Católicos (UNEC) [National Union of Catholic Students]. Mao Tse Tung [Mao Zedong (1893–1976), aka Chairman Mao, founder of People's Republic of China.]

[00:29:05.17] Working with university students. Story about students taking her to see film "The

Exorcist" (1973). Sendero Luminoso ["Shining Path", communist militant group].

[00:32:55.15] Community life in Peru. Sister Teresa Avalos (1934–). Sister Therese Donahue (1931–2016). Sister Celia DuRea '99. Nursing Sisters from St. Louis, Missouri and New York. Story about attack on village in [Mole??], Peru. Liberation theology preventing violence.

[00:34:54.25] Earthquakes in Peru. Sisters killed (1980??). Chimbote, Peru (1985??).

[00:35:38.04] Lay empowerment in Peru. Mission in Amazon near San Ignacio, Peru. [Awanudas??] people. Indigenous catechists. Story about women fighting reconciling in church.

[00:41:09.10] Influential people in Peru. Ica, Peru (18 years). Story about ordination of young journalist [Lucho??] who insulted Cardinal Landázuri [Juan Landázuri Ricketts (1913–1997), Archbishop Emeritus of Lima, Peru]. Returning to Peru.

[00:48:01.06] History of Soledad Enrichment Action Inc. (SEA) ministry against gang violence. Church of Our Lady of Soledad, Los Angeles. "Throw-away kids". Working with SEA youth in school. Gang life.

[00:52:37.27] Conferences for SEA youth to "export peace". Rigoberta Menchú Tum [(1959–), Guatemalan human rights activist and Nobel Peace Laureate] speaking on forgiveness. Jody Williams [(1950–), American political activist and Nobel Peace Laureate] speaking on land-mines. Arun Manilal Gandhi [(1934–), Indian–American socio-political activist, grandson of Mohandas Gandhi] speaking on being a peacemaker. Students visiting Congo for 2 weeks with Professor Mutombo Nkulu–N'Sengha of Bumuntu Peace Institute (BPI) for child soldiers. Ishmael Beah (1980), Sierra Leonean author and human rights activist, former child soldier. José Moreno Hernández [(1962), American engineer and former NASA astronaut] speaking on "reaching your dreams".

[00:59:00.28] Conferences on human trafficking. Ten Global Call to Action issues from Nobel Peace Laureates. Student projects. Description of operations. Holistic education.

[01:02:35.13] Founding Parents Helping Parents organization educating parents against violence in homes. Brother [Modesto?]. Working with parents, sheriffs, students, judges. Influence of parents.

[01:05:01.04] Charism and discerning needs of the people. Founders asking about needs. Preserving human agency: "personal power is a seed".

[01:08:52.07] Formation of CSJ articulation of charism. Unity and reconciliation. Unifying love. Action not words.

[01:10:42.16] Joys of life as CSJ. "Fighting God". Doing new things. "Yesterday thoughts".

[01:12:31.02] Advice for students on spirituality and leadership. Cleaning our thinking. Privilege of living today. Seeds of Peace leadership development organization. Youth promoting world change.

[01:17:59.20] Other reflections. Keep growing. Studying quantum physics.

[01:20:02.01] Pride in CSJ community. Supporting each other.

[01:21:38.08] [Director's comments].

[01:21:49.02] "Spanglish" and first impressions with youth.

[01:23:05.01] End of interview.